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EVERYTHING YOU NEED: The guesthouse has a kitchen complete with crockery and cutlery. A guesthouse bedroom has big windows overlooking the hills and Gonubie river, and a hygienic compost toilet helps keep the establishment off the grid. Pictures: SUPPLIED

Homestead owners' piece of paradise is completely off the grid

Beautiful tiny model home guest house even has compost toilet

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Have you ever milked a cow? Many may be able to say "yes" to this question, but for those whose answer is "no", this is just one of the new experiences to look forward to when visiting Heartwood Homestead.

Situated on the R102 in Goube — 8km from Beacon Bay Retail Park — Heartwood Homestead is a unique off-the-grid eco farm.

Running on solar power and 17 rain water tanks scattered around the property, the farm uses no municipal services and instead relies on the ingenuity and savviness of owners, Roger and Karen Galloway.

The small working farm is filled with growing food sources throughout, boasting a kitchen garden with raised beds, a bigger market garden that makes use of a waterwise gravity-fed drip irrigation system and a food forest that is mostly left to its own devices.

Greywater systems redirect excess water from the kitchen sink, shower and eco washing machine to the fruit trees that surround the red zinc-walled farm house.

Loosely based on permaculture principles, the farm runs symbiotically, each system benefiting the other in some way.

"Everything we grow is 100% pesticide free and we make use of regenerative farming methods using ultra high density grazing in rotating camps," said Roger, a former graphic designer from Johannesburg.

Roger, 43, said this method benefited both the land and the grazing animals — allowing the land to regenerate and new growth to take place during the rest periods in each camp.

"We also use the compost created from our rabbits and chickens in our gardens.

"There's a symbiosis and interconnectedness of all the systems here."

The couple previously lived in the former Transkei for 10 years, setting up a similar off-the-grid homestead in Cebe where they moved after living in Zithulele village.

While at Zithulele Roger worked alongside an NGO while Karen worked as the chief physiotherapist at Zithulele Hospital.

"The NGO Roger had been running before moving to Zithulele did overland travel trips.

"Roger felt it would be good to combine the fun of adventure travel with using young energy to do useful things, partnering with people in the areas travelled to, facilitating outreach teams in the area and it made sense to be based there," said Karen, 43.

"I wanted to work in a place where my skills would be most needed and usefully applied."

Roger said after years of trying to have a permanent place to



HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: Karen and Roger Galloway relax in front of their eco off-the-grid farmhouse. Picture: MADELEINE CHAPUT

put down their roots — to no avail — the couple decided to buy a plot outside East London.

Starting construction in January 2019, Karen, Roger and their Galloway clan — comprising three children, three dogs and a cat — now spend their days tending to the Heartwood Homestead farm.

Nine-year-old Tessa is the rabbit expert and come rain or shine she is at the bunny hutch every morning at 6am to feed and check on them.

Karen — a former Cape Townian who is still a practising physiotherapist — milks the two resident cows as the sun

rises every day before taking a morning walk around the property with their two boys — Pete, eight and Connor, six — and doggy companions.

Various products and produce including kombucha, chemical and pesticide-free vegetables, butter, cheese, cream and even reclaimed timber wood products — created in Roger's small carpentry workshop — are all produced on the farm.

Roger, who still does graphic design work, said they hadn't consciously chosen the farm life, but rather stumbled into it.

"It was definitely more of a progression not a conscious

decision. "We started with a veggie garden and then rain water tanks, then I bought Karen two sheep for our anniversary one year and then we got cows and it just kept growing.

"We found a better way to live and kept at it," said Roger.

Describing almost everything as "free-range" — from their chickens to their home-schooled children — Karen and Roger officially started welcoming guests to the farm in October 2020 — offering a one-of-a-kind experience.

"We actually had our first guest at the end of 2019 but just started taking off and then lockdown hit," said Karen.

Their secluded off-the-grid modern cottage overlooks a magnificent view of rolling hills and the Gonubie river and offers up to three guests the opportunity to live a simple, eco-friendly life away from the city for a few days.

"The guest house was a way for us to host people on the farm and have an extra source of income, but more than that it's a way to expose people to alternative ways of doing things," said Roger.

"When you turn the tap on where does water come from? When you flush a toilet where does it go?"

"Where does your food come from? Is it local or is it im-

ported? "Who benefits from your food purchases?"

"These are the kinds of things we want to get people thinking about," said Roger.

The quirky guest house is made out of timber framing with zinc walls, all the furniture — from the kitchen counters to the space-efficient couch is made by Roger and his carpentry team.

The home is designed using a Tiny House model where less is more. Though not huge, the design makes the best use of the space available.

While eco-friendly and off-the-grid may scare some people, especially when the term "com-

post toilet" is thrown around very casually by the Galloways, rest-assured this simple way of living — especially at Heartwood Homestead — is comfortable, clean and refreshing.

No, there is no Wi-Fi or TV available — and yes there is a compost toilet in the house.

"The biggest thing for people is getting past the mental block of having a compost toilet in a home, but the way we've designed them is really clean and comfortable.

"With an abundance of white tiles, we tried to over-emphasize the hygienic nature of the unit," said Roger, while throwing sawdust down the toilet.

"We collect the saw dust from

the carpentry workshop and it's used in the compost toilets to balance the nitrogen.

"Because it's an aerobic process, there's minimal odour, it just takes some managing."

He said it would take about a year for the matter to break down into usable compost for the farm, depending on how often the toilets were used.

"We use the compost on trees and not on any green leafy vegetables just in case, but it's safe to use after so long," said Roger.

Karen said they ensured the farm was run in a very water-wise manner, had no lawns that needed watering and had indigenous plants wherever possible.

She said the compost toilets were one of the biggest water-savers.

"We also have compost toilets in our home and they use absolutely no water.

"An eco-flush toilet can use as little as five litres of water, but if you have a water toilet and have water restrictions it won't work.

"You can't survive on rain water and still be flushing," explained Karen.

The Heartwood Homestead guest house also boasts a private braai area situated under a growing canopy of trees overlooking the valley and Gonubie River.

Herb and vegetable plants are also scattered in the guest home's garden for guests to use.

Roger said since opening, the guest house had seen a mix of South Africans and even foreign visitors, with 45% occupancy in January 2021.

Always happy to welcome guests onto the farm, offer up a lesson in milking cows, gardening or even just a chat over some of their home-brewed kombucha, the Galloways know how to offer up a wonderful and unique experience.

The couple hope to expose more people to their way of life, whether it be through a relaxing stay at their guest house or their agricultural apprenticeship programme.

"We've managed to get some funding and want to offer two people a nine-month apprenticeship programme where they learn how to run a farm this way.

"We'd accommodate them on the farm and the two apprentices would learn about animal husbandry, vegetable and fruit production and processing as well as the other skills required to manage a small farm, like basic accounting, budgeting, computers, the tourism component and character development," Karen explained.

Heartwood Homestead is listed on the Airbnb app and website, but enquiries can also be made by contacting Roger on 083-275-9427. For more information visit www.heartwood-homestead.co.za



ON THE JOB: Karen Galloway milks the two cows on the Heartwood Homestead farm every morning as the sun rises. Roger Galloway feeds the two pigs on the farm and shows off the farm's vegetable and fruit garden. Pictures: MADELEINE CHAPUT